

Explore the significance of the ways that denouement is presented in the two crime texts you have studied. (25 marks)

Both texts place great significance in the ways in which key information is revealed to the reader throughout the novels. However the main reveal; the denouement, is where the authors apply themselves the most to present this in the most effective way. Kate Atkinson follows the theme of her novel as one that is meant to subvert the genre and bend the rules and Agatha Christie uses this to shock her readers and move the novel away from typical expectations of following her previous novels.

Throughout WWTBGN, Atkinson builds the mystery of Joanna's disappearance, this is not established as a kidnap and therefore a crime until roughly chapter 36 where the kidnaper herself confirms her situation through her own perspective. "She guessed they were going to kill her eventually, when she'd served her purpose." This is a late reveal for the crime which is very unusual in this genre where the crime itself is usually revealed early on in the novel and then investigated. In this sense, our denouement comes in chapter 36 as both the crime and the criminal are revealed at the same time, therefore all of our information comes at once after a long wait. This completely contradicts earlier expectations of crime as individuals such as SS Van Dine state that "400 pages for any crime lesser than murder will not suffice"; in this novel we do actually wait roughly 350 pages for a crime that isn't murder. This highlights how unusual her approach is, instead of making us wait to find out who the killer is, we wait to find out what the crime is. Typically in crime novels, the main transgression will be revealed early on to allow a focused investigation to ensue, for example in *An Inspector Calls* Eva's death is established early in the book, so early that it actually happened before the narrative begins. Atkinson's approach is effective as it contradicts the usual pattern of crime novels and gives a refreshing new approach to this genre. By being able to engage the readers despite doing all of the things that would supposedly bore them, Atkinson proves early critics wrong. Arguably, her method here can be seen as having a negative effect as all of the events seem to happen at once and the ending could be said to be rushed and unsatisfying. This is because everything happens at once in this pivotal chapter; the crime is revealed, the criminal is revealed and the victim escapes. On the other hand, this can be seen as a success as it follows her original intent to present her readers with a realistic, modern crime investigation. Atkinson's newer approach has enabled readers to relate to the genre as it accurately reflects modern day society and modern fears which will increase reader engagement and the overall effectiveness of her novel. Another characteristic of Atkinson's denouement at the end of this novel is the narrative gaps that are left unfilled. This also supports the idea of creating a modern and realistic representation of crime as in an investigation justice is not always achieved and many questions are left unanswered. Following the reveal of the criminals, the book does not end with their arrest as in a modern setting, legal justice can be difficult to achieve. The only form of justice we achieve is moral due to Andrew Decker's suicide and the death of Joanna's kidnapers by her hand as she "jammed the pen into his eyeball" for one and "stuck the knife into the common carotid artery" of the other. It can be argued that this form of justice for us is more satisfying than an arrest for a modern audience and therefore increases reader enjoyment. Due to the growing mistrust of the

police, it can be more satisfying for readers to see their heroes take justice into their own hands. For a feminist author like Atkinson, having her female heroine save herself instead of waiting for the typical white male detective to save her, can also boost reader enjoyment and realistic nature of her novel. Ultimately, this proves that Atkinson uses her denouement in this novel to subvert rules and expectations within the genre in favour of creating a more realistic representation of crime in a modern setting. With the investigation taking a long time to begin and the crime not always being murder, furthermore, by showing that legal justice is often not achieved she addresses an issue within the justice system that readers themselves may relate to.

Agatha Christie's novels were successful in the Golden Age of detective fiction, a time between two world wars in which society craved simple solutions and restorations of equilibrium in their lives. This could be simulated through Christie's puzzle-like novels where the "Detective's ability to link up all the broken fragments" was "reassuring" to readers in this shattered civilization, as suggested by Edmund Wilson. Despite this, Christie broke many rules and expectations with the revelation to Roger Ackroyd's murder and rather than consoling the so called "shattered civilization" she shocked them with Sheppard's crime. Typical of her sub-genre "the cosy mystery", suspects would be gathered in one room and the truth would be revealed then. However in the case of Roger Ackroyd, this is delivered in a one on one conversation between Poirot and the killer where the wait for the information is drawn out to the very end of the chapter as "step by step" the detective explains his version of the investigation. The term "Step by step" implies a long and detailed explanation which is common in Golden Age cosy mysteries as it allows the reader to visualize the pieces of the puzzle coming together rather than revealing all the information very quickly. This drawn out explanation could be seen as a final chance for the reader to put the pieces together themselves to feel some satisfaction by solving it before it is revealed outright. However, it could also come across as a taunt from Christie as she spoon feeds information to readers and still prevents them from guessing the truth. Christie's pacing of the novel and placement of the denouement at the end of the book is typical of crime novels in that era, however the information revealed is highly unusual as it contradicts one of Knox's 10 commandments that states that "the criminal must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow." Despite this clear rule, we follow Sheppard's thoughts throughout the whole novel. In this sense, the text follows a typical crime structure by building up to the reveal at the end, except that the content is very unusual and doesn't follow the pattern laid out by other crime authors including Christie herself who follows these rules religiously in her other works. Christie has used this critical moment in the narrative to challenge expectations of crime readers and create a controversial ending to develop the genre. However, her dual natured murderer is a character that has appeared in earlier mysteries such as 1886 Jekyll and Hyde where the protagonist and the villain were also one and the same which shows that this is not an unheard of concept and has already received critical acclamation and success before. Together, this proves that Christie has used the typical expectations of her audience to her advantage in order to increase the effectiveness of her final reveal and maximise the shock of the denouement. This key point in the text has been used to its full effect by destroying the false sense of security that the readers had and their trust in the narrator, the point of this

seeming to be showing us that the murder can be who we least expect and that anyone can be guilty.

Furthermore, in Kate Atkinson's *When Will There Be Good News*, the climactic chapter 36 leads on to the meeting of all our main characters which is an unusual structural device in comparison to other crime novels where all the characters are usually aware of each other and have met early on in the exposition section of the text. This supports the theory that her ending may be rushed as we barely have time to explore the relationships between the characters as we would expect to in a novel so seemingly focused on characterization, of which we have 350 pages. Despite this, it could also further the realism that she attempts to create as we could understand that many of the investigative parties in a criminal procedure, never meet or rarely interact in person, rather exchange reports and pool information. Additionally, the minimal involvement of the police is effective to this intent as it shows how serious the crimes must be in order for the police to take action. Police officers tell Joanna that "this is a crime scene" which highlights how late they are coming into the process as the crime has already been resolved. By having the legal investigation begin so late in the narrative, Atkinson reinforces this idea of realism and creates frustration in the readers at the lack of attention payed to the kidnap. Police action comes into place too late in the book to be of any help and becomes more of a hindrance which increases frustrations towards the police force and reiterates Atkinson's point of a realistic crime investigation not being a neat simple puzzle that can be solved like the Golden Age crime novels. The pieces of her narrative come together very late which mimics typical investigations where detectives and police can go a long time without information or evidence but once they do everything happens very quickly. This is a more positive interpretation of her ending as it could be called lazy and rushed by some but can also be seen as a successful attempt to readers who view it as a mimicry of modern crime. As a postmodern crime novel, Atkinson successfully recreates a modern realistic setting and uses the climactic denouement to leave realistic narrative gaps and bring only some of the pieces together. Although the ending can be said to be unsatisfying, this could be for typical crime novel readers instead of postmodernists as her ending is morally satisfying rather than legally satisfying. In Christie's *Roger Ackroyd*, while the denouement reveals the information we have been seeking, it also demonstrates that the murders can be the people we least expect. It shows that while Sheppard's motives for killing Ackroyd are clear, his blackmail of Mrs Ferrars is unexpected of his character from the point of view of his associates. Christie demonstrates to us that people have a hidden side. This is made clear in the final chapters where we are clearly shown the full extent of Sheppard's personality. He becomes mean and spiteful as shown by his calling Roger Ackroyd a "pig-headed chap". This challenges the usual neat endings of crime novels like hers by leaving us with several questions that will not be answered. This creates the idea that crime can be inexplicable and strangely motivated although she does follow the typical element of greed with the blackmail of Mrs Ferrars.

In conclusion, both authors use the denouements to show a blatant disregard for literary rules within the genre and to challenge the expectations of the readers in order to provoke change and evolution in this area of literature. With Atkinson promoting a realistic setting and investigation by frustrating the readers and leaving narrative gaps as it would be in real life.

Christie conveys to her readers that the criminals aren't always understandable and can fool us all. Motivations may be unclear and we won't always get all of our answers.